

By MIKE WHITESMAN: Wycombe Wanderers 3, Walthamstow Avenue 2

NO ONE gives anything away to a team with the power to take it all. So Wycombe Wanderers can expect many more struggles like that offered by an improved Walthamstow Avenue in Saturday's opening to the 1970-71 season at Loakes Park.

A Walthamstow goal late into injury time made the scoreline seem tighter than the game had actually been. But their two points will cost Wanderers dear; Tony Horseman needed eight stitches in a dislocated thumb, and Les Hart-ridge — in his first competitive outing for the club — was helped off dragging an injured right leg.

Both will miss games as a result; Hartridge's ligament trouble in particular is feared to be fairly serious.

Wanderers lined up more or less as predicted, although it was Keith Blunt who eventually filled in as full back partner to Charlie Gale. Other than Hartridge from Slough, the new men were Bernie Bremer (Wealdstone), and Ted Powell and Larry Pritchard (both Sutton United and England), the latter kicking off the season as substitute for Horseman.

At first Wycombe were all speed and enthusiasm without the penetration to offset Walthamstow's stubborn defensive play.

Against Cheltenham, the Blues had worn down their opponents and finally broken through midway into the first half. But Avenue held out more successfully past this danger period and Wycombe's forwards began to lose their early edge.

It looked in fact as if they had overshot themselves. So when Horseman — annually Wanderers' leading goalscorer — injured his right hand in a goalline incident after 32 minutes, the visitors' seemed about to work right back into the game.

A tactical change coupled with the introduction of Pritchard two minutes later, put new sparkle into Wanderers' attack however. For although neither Anthony nor Hutchinson met with much joy previously, they swapped wings in a move that was to 'free' both.

Suddenly Walthamstow faced a new threat. In the 37th minute, Keith Searle had a shot bodied off the line and Blunt's return volley was headed away to safety.

Thus unsettled, the visitors were perfect prey for the 45th minute move Wycombe had in store for their first League goal of the campaign. Bernie Bremer sent a fine free kick into Avenue's area where Delaney flicked the ball into goal off his head.

Saved further punishment by the half time whistle, Walthamstow had been reduced to conceding a succession of free kicks after petty fouls. But they were still in the reckoning.

Perhaps Wanderers might have rectified that particular oversight earlier had their tall midfield duo, Bremer and Hart-ridge been as positive thinking from the kick off as against Cheltenham, when their merging with the forwards had paid handsome dividends. For this Wycombe waited until the second half.

Walthamstow's lanky centre forward, Cogger, scorned a guilt edged chance to equalise within three minutes of the second half by tamely lobbing into John Maskell's hands.

Twice in seconds Wycombe's lead nearly widened. First Anthony saw his shot cleared off the line, then Blunt — displaying all his customary attacking flair, even as a full back — sent the ball crashing onto the Avenue crossbar.

Defensively Wycombe need not mourn too long the switch into professional football of Peter Suddaby. International veteran Powell has the positioning instinct and calm dependability to cover any gaps caused by the upfield wanderings of Delaney and Blunt.

But a mistake by Maskell in trying to clear a 56th minute corner led to Walthamstow's equaliser, scored from virtually point blank range by Cogger.

Maskell's unusually suspect goalkeeping was the most disappointing aspect of a laudable Wanderers performance.

Again it was skipper Delaney to the rescue as three minutes later Big John cannoned in a penalty, given for a foul on Searle by Wilson.

Avenue could hardly have argued over the decision; a sizeable piece of shirting was ripped off the Wycombe centre forward's back during the infringement.

Nor could they have doubted the validity of Wanderers' third goal netted five minutes later when Bremer found the post with a 20 yard shot, and Anthony chipped the rebound over goalkeeper Bowley.

Walthamstow introduced Cane in place of Pellichi for the final 20 minutes during which Hutchinson's activities in particular proved troublesome.

Roseman lofted the ball onto Wycombe's crossbar after 79 minutes, and after Hartridge was hurt in an 87th minute tackle, ten-man Wanderers conceded a second goal — again to Cogger — late into injury time.

WYCOMBE WANDERERS: J. Maskell; K. Blunt, C. Gale; E. Powell, J. Delaney, L. Hartridge; G. Anthony, B. Bremer, K. Searle, A. Horseman (sub: L. Pritchard, 34 minutes) J. Hutchinson.

WALTHAMSTOW AVENUE: V. Bowley; Janes, R. Reoman; G. Rockman, B. Wilson, Pellichi (sub: R. Cane, 70 minutes); T. Smith, Scarf, V. Cogger, A. McDermid, J. Roseman.

ATTENDANCE: 1,825.

Gate and stand receipts: £304...